

East Coast as well. There is now a local group in Long Beach, Sacramento, Washington, D.C. and New York City. People are trying to organize groups in Minneapolis, Austin, Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Charlotte, Portland (OR) and Portland (ME). New groups are forming spontaneously. Write to us for a handbook on how to start a group in your town. The time has come. Food Not Bombs. Start one or join one today!!

**EAST COAST**

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**WEST COAST**

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**Food  
Not  
Bombs**

## **A Short History of the Food Not Bombs Affinity Group**

*The first ten years, 1980-1989.*

The original Food Not Bombs was a work collective and community which formed after the May 24, 1980 occupation attempt of the Seabrook Nuclear Power Project in New Hampshire. We were one of the many groups which grew out of the Clamshell Alliance. The original members participated in the nonviolent direct action at Seabrook and were drawn together to continue the organizing work against nuclear madness and also to nurture the vision of a new way of life which is in all ways life-sustaining rather than life-threatening. In keeping with this vision, we chose to live communally and work collectively.

Our first action was to set up a soup line outside the annual stockholders meeting of the First National Bank of Boston. Beside being the largest bank in New England, the First was responsible for the financial "red-lining" of many neighborhoods in

Coalition of the Homeless in San Francisco. Within the first month, Food Not Bombs had over 50 contacts for collecting and distributing food with start-up costs of under \$100. After six months, there was a daily network of food collection and distribution and a weekly hot meal table in Golden Gate Park.

In August, 1988, the city decided this activity, i.e., feeding people for free in the park, was illegal and proceeded to arrest Food Not Bombs volunteers for handing out food. Over the course of five weeks, 94 people were arrested, culminating on Labor Day with 54 arrested on that day alone. Not one of those illegally arrested ever had a day in court (all the charges were dropped) and the meal distribution in Golden Gate Park never missed one week and is still happening to this day!! Not only is this one still happening, but because of the international press coverage of these arrests, Food Not Bombs has grown. By the end of 1988, meals were being distributed *every day* somewhere in the Bay Area by Food Not Bombs. In fact, Food Not Bombs was one of the first groups out on the streets with a hot meal immediately after the earthquake in 1989.

In 1989, new Food Not Bombs groups have sprung up in cities up and down the West Coast and on the

which had the look and feel of a war zone. Eventually, we became so pervasive in Cambridge that we became the official food distribution organization for the City of Cambridge. Today, this organization distributes well over 200,000 pounds of recovered food each year in Cambridge alone. It is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation and is called the Food For Free Committee of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Self-determination is the key to pride and for many, Food Not Bombs has been a vehicle for the rebirth of self-worth and empowerment. Most of the food distributed by Food Not Bombs goes to people who do not qualify for government support or who find traditional food programs insulting and humiliating. But they still need to eat. And the food we recover would otherwise be wasted. They help us and we help them. We see that the people in need of food and the people gathering the food are one people. Although we protest, governments continue spending billions of dollars on weapons of death while millions of people go hungry. We know that we, the people, are the ones who are going to change this injustice, not any government.

Food Not Bombs started a group in San Francisco in January 1988. The first contact was with the

Boston, leading to economic decline and poverty for many people of color. The First also provided easy term, gigantic revolving "sweethart" loans to make possible the building of the Seabrook Nuke and is the money behind much of the weapons industry in New England. It was also involved with big time drug money laundering from South and Central America. As the stockholders walked by, we fed a hot meal to hundreds of homeless people and fellow activists. Several stockholders stopped to talk with us and stuffed a dollar or two into our bucket to help us get started.

From this exciting beginning, we began looking for additional ways we could use food as an organizing tool. We knew from working in local restaurants and natural foods stores that a large amount of edible food was being discarded while homeless people (whom we saw as political refugees) were going hungry right down the block. So, with our '68 Dodge van, we started a program of collecting and distributing surplus food. One member of our collective worked at a natural food grocery store and was able to bring the discarded surplus food to the Food Not Bombs house after work. A tofu manufacturer who delivered tofu to this store from Western Massachusetts told us they discarded hundreds of pounds of tofu that was the "wrong size"

each week and that they could deliver it to us to give to the poor. A bakery in Harvard Square, which only sold "made fresh daily" bread, was willing to give us as many as ten garbage bags full of bread every day, exactly at seven o'clock in the morning, not a minute later or earlier. For one year, we arrived every morning on time and only missed a total of five days before they allowed us to collect the bread when it fit more conveniently into our schedule.

At first, we brought this food primarily to shelters in the South End of Boston. Every other day, we would arrive at the Pine Street Inn in our old van. Six or seven men standing outside the Inn would help us unload the food into the kitchen and thank us for our work. We would go from shelter to shelter all over the South End. Many of these shelters were for battered women (helping battered women was considered illegal at the time) and political refugees mostly from Central America and the Caribbean. They could not get support from the usual sources because of who they were. Often, Food Not Bombs was their only source of free food. Over the months we became friends with the people at each stop and became part of their struggle, as they, too, became part of our struggle to stop militarism and nuclear madness.

folks were not pleased so they called the police on us. Since we knew the police and had a positive working relationship with them, this was not a threat to us. As it turned out, we had a permit for our table, but the Pepsi people did not! They packed up and left, but were back the next day. So were we. Again they called the police and again we were allowed to stay and they left. This happened twice more, until the police told them that if they called again, they would be arrested for disturbing the peace!! They finally gave up and left Cambridge.



During the first three years of our work, we reached thousands of people. We told them about the existing network of shelters to help people in need and about our food distribution network to these shelters. Due to the economic injustice of the policies of the Reagan Administration, the shelters started overflowing and were unable to keep pace with the growing need. At about this time, homelessness became a national issue and many people started donating food directly to the shelters, as well as to Food Not Bombs. We expanded our network by distributing food directly to people in need, primarily at housing projects and in low income neighborhoods. Before long, we were delivering free food to every project in Cambridge and several in Boston, including Columbia Point,

We also provided literature and hot vegetarian meals at political rallies, demonstrations, and nonviolent direct actions. We always offered the meals and information at no cost; however, we did encourage donations to help cover our expenses. We attended several events each week in the Greater Boston area, covering a wide spectrum of issues, all of which we saw as interconnected. Foremost in our minds was the connection between rampant military growth and the increase in poverty. This quite readily grew from our earlier understanding of the connection between the business and government attitude which allowed and promoted the nuclear industry, both power and weapons, and the growing disregard for life, both towards the environment and towards other people. Eventually, our circle of issues expanded to included those which focused on justice and equality for all.

Food Not Bombs became known for its commitment to political action, nonviolence in words and actions, consensus decision making, and good tasting, high quality, strictly vegetarian food. We used no animal products which emphasized our respect for all life. We also designed many of the buttons, t-shirts, and literature we distributed at our tables. Our tables became a safe place to express ideas without fear. Military men would tell us stories about war, worried people would stop by to get support and inspiration,

busy people would just drop a dollar in our bucket and say, "Keep up the good work!" and "Please, what ever you do, don't ever stop!"

Often, activists from other groups would stop by with flyers about their group's upcoming action to display on our table. Very often, we'd be at that event with a food table and leaflets advertising yet another event. The staff at the tables found each day to be rewarding and looked forward to the next time on the streets, often the very next day.

One of our earliest victories occurred in Harvard Square in 1982. We regularly set up information tables on the sidewalk. One day, when we arrived at our usual spot, we discovered the "Pepsi Challenge!" Some of you may remember this was an advertising gimmick to promote this legal drug by giving it away free to get you hooked, then selling it to you at ridiculously high prices. (Sound familiar?) Anyway, we seized the opportunity, and left only to return a short while later with our own booth, the "Tofu Challenge". We had a huge sign and a cooler filled with tofu smoothies, a nourishing drink made by blending fruit with tofu and ice. We stood there and called out, "Try the Tofu Challenge. There is more nutrition in one ounce of tofu smoothie, than in *all* the Pepsi in the world." Needless to say, the Pepsi